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Equality for Excellence? Justification of sex equality promotion in transforming Finnish academia

Abstract

In the Nordic countries, educational and employment policies have embraced the aims of sex equality for some decades. These goals, however, fluctuate under the pressure of other educational and economic demands. This article examines how the promotion of sex equality is justified in Finnish academia in the context of the university reform in the 2010s. Through a variety of documentary materials on equality politics and higher education policies relevant to the reform, the aim is to identify different types of arguments and to observe, how sex equality appears within them. The findings indicate how universities' equality agenda is strictly based on legislation, and as a part of human resources, also adapted on managerial practices. The instrumental approaches with utility-based arguments on equality for organisational and national advantages are dominant. The arguments of common good and welfare are also widely expressed, but followed by abstract notions of fair and respectful treatment. Rights-based arguments in universities' equality agenda pursue equal opportunities on resources, professional development and career advance, which in higher education policy documents turn into strongly instrumental aim of individual talent acquisition. This view of equality seems to be more compatible with the increasing search for excellence and competitiveness in educational policies.

Key words: sex/gender equality politics, higher education policy, university reform, Finland

Introduction

In Finland, along with its Nordic neighbours, the principal of equality has been the cornerstone in the development of the welfare state as well as in education and working life. The educational equality, in particular, has enjoyed widespread support in higher education (Hauhia, 2015), supplemented with the demands of sex¹ equality since the last decades. Nevertheless, educational policies increasingly following the incentives of efficiency and profitability – labelled also as an “ethos of excellence” (Simola, 2001) – have been argued to transcend equality aims. Still, the institutional requirements to promote equality have even tightened.

In this article, I aim to clarify this contradiction by asking how the promotion of sex equality is justified in the context of transforming academia. I focus on the arguments expressed in universities’ official equality agenda and in selected higher education and research policy documents. In Finland, equality politics in the university context has been examined from the perspectives of equality work (Husu, 2002) and comparing the appearance of gender equality in Government’s equality and higher education and research policies at the period of 1995–2008 (Brunila, 2009a). In addition, equality planning has been studied in various educational institutions and workplaces (Ikävalko & Brunila, 2011; Ikävalko, 2013; Ylöstalo, 2012; Saari, 2013), which also cover the questions of justifications. This article mainly bases on Nielsen (2014), who recently approached the justification of gender equality promotion in the context of Scandinavian universities. I extend the question to Finnish academia by asking how the different arguments appear in relation to higher education policies relevant to the university reform in the 2010s.

The university reform appears as a confirmation of the marketization and management by results, a globally recognised process commenced in Finnish academia since the 1990s. The Universities Act of 2009 transformed the position of universities and personnel, which made academia a topical subject of research. Recent studies cover also gendered questions, but the perspective of equality politics has remained relatively marginal. In addition, despite the comments from outside (e.g. national Ombudsman for Equality) and inside academia (e.g. Naskali 2009a; Niemi, 2009), questions of sex equality were widely ignored in the pursuance of structural reform as well as in public discussion. In many universities, equality plans were left outdated during other administrative duties (Lätti, 2012), though institutional commitments require to mainstream (sex) equality aspects in all actions.

In Finland, sex equality is commonly regarded as self-evidently advancing national characteristic, which easily impedes the discussion about the actual policy aims, actions and motives behind the drive for it. At the universities, this means paying attention to the officially produced arguments and conceptions. Justification appears as a common surface for interacting policy agendas; it combines equality into other organisational demands and reveals its institutional position. I limit the focus on *sex* equality, since universities’ requirements to follow and report equality situation mainly concentrate on its sphere. According to the separate legislation for equality and non-discrimination², equality plans refer officially to sex. However, due to the amendments in the latter, they increasingly include also the ban on discrimination based on other traits. The common solution is the combined sex equality and non-discrimination documentary and thus, the arguments are not entirely separable for the analysis either.³

I begin with conceptual starting points, followed by the research questions. Next, I introduce the data and the way in which the content analysis of documentary data is conducted. The analysis is divided into three main arguments, leading to the introductory description of equality within them. Finally, I

¹ I use the word “sex” instead of “gender” in order to pay attention to the culturally varying ways in concept translations and usage (cf. Radcliffe-Richards 2014). The Finnish word *sukupuoli* (“half of the kin”) lacks the distinction between the biological and the social. The term “gender” is used when quoting studies, where the author him/herself originally employs it.

² Act on Equality between Women and Men 1986 and Non-discrimination Act 2014 (repealed the old one, from 2004).

³ Non-discrimination Act is referred somewhat differently among universities, resulting to the translations of “The University plan on equality and *parity*”, “Equality and *diversity* plan” or “Equality and *equal opportunities* policy”.

observe the confluences and tensions in the argumentation with higher education policies and reflect on their conceptual consequences in defining equality in the university context.

Conceptual starting points

As part of the wider democratization in the 1960s, equality was seen as “equality for all” attached especially to the societal, regional and educational equality, where sex equality was rather subsumed. Over the next decades, sex equality started to occupy conceptions of equality in mainstream education and employment policies – in Finland somewhat later than in other Nordic countries. The membership of the European Union in 1995 and increasing transnational influences strengthened the focus on sex but also on anti-discrimination measures. This together with the increasing market orientation is said to have challenged the traditional Nordic idea of collective equality and turned it towards individually oriented view. (E.g. Kantola et al., 2012; Simola et al., 2002; Svensson, 2006; Svensson et al., 2004). The conceptual distinctions can be traced in the current usage and Finnish legislation, where the term “equality”, the common translation of the word *tasa-arvo*, has been established mainly as equality between men and women. Instead, *yhdenvertaisuus*, translated as “non-discrimination” refers to the prohibition of discrimination based on other personal characteristics, such as age, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, language or disability.⁴

The concept of sex equality is approached by recognising its ambiguous nature. Historically, equality has served to justify even opposing social goals and political decisions. (Holli, 2003; Kantola et al. 2012; Kuusipalo, 2002.) Different understandings of basic concepts have an influence on the aims of equality politics (Julkunen, 2009; Laiho, 2013; Lätti, 2012; Rees, 2001; Ylöstalo, 2012). The interpretation frame for sex equality is outlined on the grounds of understanding educational equality (e.g. Kalalahti & Varjo 2012) and sex equality in education (e.g. Unterhalter, 2005; Aikman & Rao, 2012; Kantola et al., 2012). I interpret the dominant arguments of justification of sex equality in universities’ equality politics through simplified dimensions relative to their focus in intended, concrete policy actions.

The first dimension focuses on equal opportunities for men and women, which means the guarantee of the formal, equal rights (conservative view) or removing the external barriers (liberal view). The requirements concentrate mainly on public domain with the strong belief in legislation, and the motive of equalising resources and representation is usually economic. The second one emphasizes equal outcomes, including the idea of stronger affirmatives actions or special resources for to guarantee equal results. In policymaking, this view is usually materialised as a specific female perspective. It pays attention also to structures and power relations. The last one combines the views of intersectionalism – sex as overlapping with other traits. It materialises as a recognition on difference, including the question of sexual diversity or highlighting the individual rights and opportunities as a condition for sex equality.

The Equality Act (1986), the Constitution of Finland and labour legislation, which universities are obliged to implement as public corporations⁵, employers and educational institutions, regulate the promotion of equality in organizations. Amendments especially to the equality legislation have increased obligations to plan, evaluate, measure and report equality. Sex equality is under close evaluation, as since 1995 universities have been obliged to plan equality promotion, extended in 2005 with requirements concerning the content and detailed compilation of sex-related statistics, especially on pay and representation of men and women. Equality plans must be produced every few years including the necessary actions to promote sex equality, achieve equal pay, and evaluate the implementation of earlier measures and their outcomes. (Act on Equality, 6§, 15.4.2005/232.) Besides the equal treatment and opportunities, the Equality Act has aimed to promote women’s position in

⁴ See the conceptual questions of equality and non-discrimination from the perspectives of legislation and politics more specifically from Kantola et al. 2012).

⁵ Except for two universities, that are foundations.

working life (Julkunen, 2010). The latest amendment (2014) included the questions of gender identity and expression.

The Universities Act altered the juridical status of Finnish universities, with each university becoming either a public corporation or foundation. This changed the universities' economic situation, confirming the dominance of entrepreneurship and market orientation (see, e.g. Nevala & Rinne, 2012; Kettunen et al., 2012). Management by results has been established by "ideological change", where universities are seen as centres of innovation and excellence and where the discourse of efficiency, productivity and international rankings has penetrated throughout academia (Universities Act, 2009; National Innovation...; Koski, 2009). "In recent years, universities have been reformed to enable them to achieve the highest international level in scientific research." (Research and Innovation...) The reform transformed also the management system and the position of personnel from the holders of offices to employees. Productization and the economic pressure on universities have altered the management of human resources (Ylijoki, 2010), which the equality work is closely attached to and dependent on.

In his analysis of gender equality statements at different Scandinavian universities, Nielsen (2014) discovered rhetorical differences in the policy documents based on the understanding of equality as a value in itself or as an instrumental tool. All studied universities used utility-based arguments when justifying organisational gender equality actions, but with distinctive importance. The first type underlines the benefits and strategic advantages, emphasising organisational success and competition, the improvement of the abilities and realization of potential. The second type refers to the equal treatment, welfare and "common good" as founding principles of the university. The third type juxtapose the arguments of justice and difference to achieve equal opportunities. The main division between the different arguments is whether they refer primarily on the aspects of competitiveness and success, or draw also on justice-oriented arguments and equal right.

Attention is paid on the justification and adjustment of the equality, since equality is often not prioritized during the organizational reforms (eg. Skjeie and Teigen, 2003) and conceptions of equality and justice rather adjust along with the transformations (Bacchi, 2001). This indicates the tendency of equality issues to be adapted to other goals considered more important (Julkunen, 2009) and the interest in organizations often increases when the rhetoric focuses on benefits (Brunila, 2009b). This is seen as opposing arguments based on rights, justice and democratic participation (Squires, 2007). In the increasing market orientation in higher education policies, equality of outcome might be seen as an obstacle to excellence and competitiveness (Naskali 2009b).

Following on these starting points, my research questions are:

- 1) How is sex equality promotion justified in the universities' equality agenda in relation to higher education policy documents?
- 2) How does sex equality appear within the dominant arguments?

The approach to the documentary data

I approach academia as an institutional context of education and work, where different policy agendas interact and where equality politics, as a sector of socio-policies, are meant for governing the equality promotion. The analysis is based on a variety of policy documents on equality and on higher education relevant to the university reform. The primary data consists of universities' equality planning, as institutionally applied policy tool, usually placed under university's personnel administration. Equality plans were collected from Finnish multidisciplinary universities⁶, where they are compiled and

⁶ The analysis covers all 10 multidisciplinary universities and two universities of technology under the Ministry of Education and Culture. The University of Arts and the Swedish-language Hanken School of Economics are excluded, since they specialize in economics/arts, and in addition, the former was founded only in 2013. At the time of data collection, separate equality plans were found for all but two universities of technology, which mentioned equality in their quality manuals.

updated every 2-3 years by equality boards⁷. These are related to the national higher education policies that describe the visions for the development of universities, research and science. This secondary data is restricted to central reports produced after the university reform by main actors: Ministry of Education and Culture, the Research and Innovation Council and the Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (see the detailed list of data in Appendix 1).

Since the purpose is to observe official equality agenda at the macro level and relate it to higher education policy documents, the intent is not to compare individual universities' (cf. Nielsen 2014). The collection of equality-related documents formulate the common equality planning with its expressions as units of the analysis. This solution is supported by the observation that equality plans are quite similar according to the requirements of the legislation, with the differences mainly arising from the length and particularity. Citations are included in the text in order to illustrate the nature of the data.

In order to identify different ways to justify equality promotion in academia, the data was analysed by the means of content analysis, focusing on the characteristics of language with attention to the content and contextual meaning of the text (e.g. Lindkvist, 1981). The purpose of the content analysis is to systematically describe and classify the data into categories, in order to provide understanding of the phenomenon under study (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992) and to connect the findings into wider context and to the theory (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2002). In this study, the content analysis is defined as text analytical tool for a systematic reading and interpretation of policy documents. This is based on the coding and classification of text sections, to identify different arguments on equality promotion.

I first coded the material in respect to expressed arguments on justification⁸. This was done by data-based identification of the key terms, by asking the questions of why and for what purposes and by searching the occurrences, both explicit ("is aimed at", "creates", "confirms", "following", "committed to", "for to achieve", "providing", "meant for") or implicit references. The latter included for example mentions of university as an employer or educational institution, with the assumption of the responsibility of this role. Alternative terms (*equality/non-discrimination/diversity*), synonymous usage of key concepts (*equal/similar, even; inequality/unfair, disrespectful, unjust*), opposites and negations⁹ were searched.

Based on the re-organisation of the key expressions and recurrences, I formulated a typical equality agenda. The classification was then developed further by paying special attention on the context: on which level and from whose perspective the justification takes place. The process of relating the expressions to the implicit assumptions, as well as identifying their situational usage finally enabled to create patterns (Morgan, 1993). The distinctive arguments were identified with the respect of references towards society, university strategies and the academic community. The categories were related to and named according to Nielsen's (2014) main dimensions. Higher education policy documents were then scanned for all references to equality (or nearby concepts) in overall, observed through the argumentation frame and compared to its classification. In the end, the dominant arguments were analysed from the perspectives of organisation and the personnel, which finally outlined how sex equality materializes within them.

The approach could be described as abductive, since the focus is on data-based classification developed through conceptual starting points as guiding principles (Cohen & Manion, 1994). The intent is to combine the various data, observe it in the framework of different argumentative dimensions and equality definitions. Policy documents are interpreted as "naturally" occurring legal-administrative textual data, which I understand same as Saarinen (2008) in her analysis of higher educational policies. The documents are approached not only as describing something really existing,

⁷ Equality boards of approx. 10 members usually consist of the representatives of administration, academic personnel from different levels and fields and students.

⁸ The first classification was made with the aid of ATLAS.ti software for qualitative data analysis.

⁹ "where ... not occur", "to remove barriers of", "to interfere in", "not tolerate." ; "the experiences of inequality weaken the sense of community"

nor as mere rhetoric but political interventions into practice (Ball 1993 in Saarinen, 2008). In doing so, they create and maintain certain understanding of equality, justify and direct policy actions. While the official equality agenda obliges universities, it describes the vocabulary and focus of equality promotion, thus defining its territory. Even though the study does not follow the discourse analysis as a method, it shares basic assumptions of the language and its consequences on social reality.

The present study is a cross-section into the justification of sex equality in the course of university reform in the 2010s. It focuses on the contents and relationships between the interacting policy agendas based on policy documents, rather than the actual formation of these policy processes or discourses. By contextualizing the documents into wider transformations of academia, I wish to discover what is considered important in organizations (cf. Vaara and Laine, 2006). Here, the special attention is paid to the adjustments of equality promotion in the increasing market orientation, economic efficiency and competitiveness in higher education policies. The approach identifies the motives behind different policy agendas, which might open up new perspectives on equality.

The justification of sex equality

The arguments for equality promotion in the universities' equality agenda can be divided into three main categories, which are identified on the grounds of whose perspective they refer to. The citations are translated from the universities' equality plans, if not mentioned otherwise.

The best possible working environment for all. The first category refers to the community and its members, while equality work is closely tied to the management of human resources and personnel development. Equality planning emphasizes the requirement of equal treatment to ensure that “*every member of the work community feels themselves to be treated fairly*”. The principal is expressed as “*responsibility on respectful atmosphere and to the fair treatment of others involves every member of the community*”, and should be especially embedded in leadership training as an essential managerial skill. In the documents, the promotion of equality is strongly justified in terms of creating a good working and study atmosphere, where “*experiences of inequality weaken social relations*”. Equal treatment improves well-being, while “*inappropriate behaviour weakens the functionality of the community and increases the risk of sick leaves*”. The better working capacity of the personnel is an important factor since an equal environment enables the “*improvement of different talents for the community*”, “*equal possibilities to use one's competencies*”, skill development, progression on the career ladder and success. Equality is seen as a basis for productivity, while its justification focuses on the common good of the community, health, and coping at work.

Condition for profitable action. The second category refers to the university, in terms of organisational and national strategic advantages. “*The equality plan is prepared according to the law, but also to promote the aims of the university strategy*”, and to “*develop academia and to achieve outcomes*”. The experience of equal treatment promotes a good atmosphere, which is presented as a condition for strategic goals: “*Achieving these aims requires the well-being of the work community. [...] Equal practices build the basis for this*”. Coping and success in work and studies improve efficiency, productivity and competitiveness. The equality practices “*are the basic condition for a profitable action*”. The equality plans also highlight the importance of equality actions to ensure the “*high quality and competence of the personnel*” for the success of the organization. “*The structure of the personnel should be well-balanced in relation to strategic goals*” and recruitment should be done according to the principals of the best possible and appropriate workforce. These quotations indicate the tendency to adjust equality work to the achievement of valuable strategic goals.

A few universities, which are currently re-organising the equality work, bind it as a part universities' quality assurance. The equality situation is used as one indicator of quality control while “*through the equality plan and its follow-up we can guarantee the quality of the university.*” At the same time, the amount of administrative staff in equality work is increased. Through the elaborating indicator

policy in universities, the measuring and evaluation targets also on equality with the requirements of detailed statistics and reports.

Since the law requires. The third category refers to the moral and legal responsibility towards the society. Equality appears as a self-evident principal, required by law, but also considered as basic right. Here, two approaches are traced: university as a “model student” to take care of the legislative formalities and university as “*a forerunner in equality questions, in building equal practices, tolerant and respectful atmosphere in society, in creating equality and reducing sex segregations in working life*”. The latter appears as counter-arguments to instrumental views by justifying the promotion of equality as a value in itself and attach it to principals commonly supported, such as pluralism. Equality is considered as “*a basic right, a question of human dignity and uniqueness and the aspect of humanity*”, and the university *commits itself to promote common equality and to build more equal society, that respects diversity and various perspectives*”.

All of the universities based equality planning on different legislation with its detailed requirements. “*According to the law, university promotes equality in all its actor roles, for to be a just employer and educational institution.*” This was attached to the position of the university willing to appear as a socially responsible and modern actor as an educator of future employees. In this respect, the equality work functions also as image-building, especially towards international audience. Paying attention to the role as visible actor in society, universities take seriously their legal responsibilities and fulfilling the formalities for example in recruiting. The amendments in both the equality and non-discrimination legislations have resulted in the careful inspections in order to guarantee the consequences for universities especially in terms of personnel management and recruiting.

From the perspective of the personnel, the right-based arguments emphasize identical treatment, founded on requirements of the same criteria in recruitment or other appointments. The documents pursue the equal right and opportunities for everyone in terms of professional development, access to positions and duties, an equal career ladder, the use of skills and expertise, participation in the work community and equal pay. The descriptions of equality problems concentrate on cases of discrimination and harassment as well as disrespectful attitudes and behaviour. The ban on discrimination is also emphasized in the Equality Act and through the non-discrimination lines, the equality planning increasingly include other bans on discrimination. Here, equal opportunities are defined as services and arrangements for people with special needs. The focus is on accessibility and availability, concerning for example the physical environment, language issues or other personal factors, such as learning difficulties, circumstances and motivation. In equality plans, this is also attached to claims of cultural diversity for multicultural working communities and inclusion of foreign workers.

Related to the three categories above, **higher education and research policy documents** justify equality through the similar dimensions, but with the emphasis strongly in organizational and national advantages and image building towards international audience. The publications of the Ministry of Education and Culture (e.g. Korkeakoulut 2011) consider equality as a guarantee of a good working environment, noting that higher education institutions ought to be “*competitive, equal and interesting places for studying and working*”. Education evaluation plan for 2012–2015 (OKM 2012) includes equality as one focus of external evaluation. These aims appear general and they are not defined, concretized or referring specifically on sex equality. The other publications of the ministry (The development plan for education and research for 2011–2016; The plan of action for research and innovation policy, 2012) and the FINHEEC’s Evaluation of higher education institutions’ social and regional impact (2013) do not refer to equality at all in terms of universities or research.

Research and Innovation policy guidelines regard equality as a characteristic of Finnish universities and a factor for national competitiveness. Equality is defined as equal opportunities for individuals, focusing on special needs and banning discrimination based on different personal traits. The aims focus on improving individuals’ capacities and skills, ensuring top-quality expertise and developing

creativity for an “innovative workforce”. Equality in education and working life, attached to the competences of the population, is mentioned as one of the strengths of the Finnish innovation system.

These documents link equality to recruitment and career development, especially in terms of internationalisation. Research and innovation policy guidelines for 2011–2015 notes that, multicultural working communities are deemed to generate national success. The same document considers equality between men and women – as well as the reconciliation of work and family – as the biggest problems in the development of successful and international research careers. It highlights that “*women have good opportunities to establish a research career in Finland. Practices must be changed to enable new kinds of recruitment models for researcher couples and their families, as well as other people.*”

In the intensified global competition for skilled workers, equality is attached to the desire to attract the best workforce to Finnish universities. “*One of the key national challenges is to succeed in recruiting the most gifted individuals.*”, where as “*Equality, irrespective of an individual’s background, is an important competitive and attractiveness factor*” (Research and innovation policy guidelines for 2011–2015) (The Finnish version used the word “*yhdenvertaisuus*”, in policymaking translated as “*non-discrimination*”). In the subsequent guidelines of Research and Innovation Policy Council (Reformative Finland: Research and innovation policy review 2015–2020), this latter mention transformed into “*People with different backgrounds will enrich the knowledge base and boost the ability to solve social and economic problems. **Diversity** is a factor that promotes competitiveness and sustainability in the global job market.*” [Emphasis added].

Discussion

Above, I have analysed how equality promotion is justified in the universities’ equality agenda and in higher education policy documents. Here, I reflect the main arguments by dividing them into utility-based and rights-based and observe how these arguments differ in terms of equality definitions.

In his comparative study on Scandinavian universities, Nielsen (2014) identified different approaches to justify gender equality actions and while some equality agendas primarily emphasized utility and competitiveness (Denmark), others juxtaposed the arguments of utility, equal rights and justice (Norway and Sweden). Based on my analysis, Finnish academia is closer to Norway and Sweden, since equality-related documents blend both the utility- and rights-based arguments. The distinctive categories were thus identified with the respect of references towards society, university strategies and the academic community. Related to Nielsen’s main dimensions, the equality agenda justifies equality promotion firstly by improving well-being and providing a good working environment. This type refers to the equal treatment, welfare and “common good” of the community, as founding principles of the university. Second type follows the strategic demands of university, underlines the organisational advantages and emphasizes the improvement of the abilities and realization of the best potential for organisational success. The third type carries out the responsibility towards the society, as a law-abiding and as an ethical commitment, supporting moral principles and utilizing the arguments of difference.

Based on different argumentation in documents, equality promotion seems to be balancing between legislation-based formalities, principles of common good and instrumental approach. The arguments of the common good are interpreted as *weak instrumental*, since they refer to the welfare and the sense of the community among personnel, but are completed with the notions of better working capacity for universities’ productivity. Justification through strategic aims is interpreted as *strong instrumental*, promoting both organisational and national success, especially in terms of competitiveness. Findings indicate also different levels where equality argumentation operate: At the organisational level, equality is promoted for instrumental advantages, the image building especially towards international audience and with the support of the legislation, to even out sex divisions and to promote women’s careers. At the level of personnel, equality is argued in terms of difference and equal, subjective rights focusing on anti-discrimination and identical treatment with the exceptions of special arrangements.

Similar to Nielsen (2014), arguments based on instrumental value are dominant, while rights-based are left rather abstract. Parallel to other organisations, equality promotion in academia is argued for as bringing benefits, since equal work communities are regarded to achieve the best personnel competences (cf. Brunila, 2009b). However, universities' equality-related documents, suggesting equality also as a crucial value itself, differ from the visions of higher education that primarily emphasize market orientation (see also Hauhia, 2015) and unanimously strong instrumental approach. In the latter, equality is regarded as a self-evident, while few mentions pursue the search for excellence and attracting the most talented individuals to Finnish universities. Overall, the development plans of higher education and research hardly mention sex equality, which has been the case previously as well (Brunila, 2009a). In that sense, university reform made no significant change in either way. The analysis also supports the findings of the separate and distinctive ways to approach and understand sex equality in national equality and higher education politics.

The instrumental orientation and economic vocabulary on sex equality has become evident in other contexts of education and working life as well (Brunila, 2009b; Ikävalko & Brunila, 2011; Ikävalko, 2013; Saari, 2013; Kantola, 2012). Generally, there is nothing new in this: for instance, the aims to include more women in education or working life has always included the linkage on economic efficiency (Unterhalter, 2005). Instead, the rise of strong appeal for competitiveness is notable as well as the shifts on how sex equality is understood and conducted within these arguments. On the one hand, the justifications on welfare and productivity are commonly involved in most other organisations' equality planning. This confirms the influence of the legislation, tightening obligations and standardised equality plans, which could apply to any other organisations.

In universities, requirements to follow sex equality situation are tight. The increasing organisational measurement includes equality also as an indicator of "gender impact". In German universities, for comparison, the competition for funding to encourage universities to higher achievements "Excellence Initiative" has set gender an important factor: in order to succeed in the competition, especially women's talent must be acknowledged and capitalised (Krull, 2008; Pritchard, 2010). Equality justified as an asset, is seen also in Finnish higher education and research documents' argumentation on women's career development and balancing work and family in order to ease them to accept demanding duties. Equality promotion settles itself as accepted element, but with the concerns that competing institutional demands may surpass its aims, when instrumentally used (Guerrina & Wright, 2016). According to Radcliffe-Richards (2014), all instrumental justifications are also sensitive to changing circumstances and thus quite different from those demanding equality as a requirement of justice.

How, then, these main arguments appear when observed through the different dimensions of sex equality? The sex equality as a legal and moral responsibility characterizes equality promotion through the legislation, which frames the interpretation of in/equality. The legislation is particularly referred in the aims of equal resources as well as the participation of at least 40 % of both sexes in different organs. Equal pay has been a central goal in Government's equality politics, defined by the Equality Act in terms of wage discrimination in 1986 and amended into active promotion in 2005 (Saari, 2016). The regulation of 40 % of women and men in committees was added in 1995. This dimension indicates the conception of equality as the same share, justified with the "only x % arguments". Some plans also mention the possibility of using positive discrimination in order to balance an uneven sex-distribution. This approach targets for equalizing resources and segregations, it also expresses the idea of "equality of outcomes". As justice-based argumentation, equality is connected to generally supported principles in society, but also into the demands of Non-discrimination Act. The dimension highlights equal opportunities by reducing the external barriers but without specific focus in sex equality.

The arguments referring equality as the common good of the community justifies equality with generally supported principles. Equality promotion, attached to the fair treatment and behaviour, requires responsibility of all community members, but is specifically merged with the principles of

good governance. Ylöstalo (2012) notes how equality defined at a general level blurs the concept and its interpretation and might lead to the situation, where equality is justified with everything regarded as good or fair. On the other hand, this category includes the idea of equality as a subjective feeling to be treated fairly (c.f. Holli 2002). In universities' agenda, instrumental approach relates both to the community, in terms of welfare of the personnel for productivity and to the possibilities for individuals to develop themselves. Higher education policies, by contrast, attach organisational and national advantages especially to internationalisation. Sex equality is not specifically emphasized, since the ideal behind is to achieve the best potential regardless any personal trait or background. Similarly, rights-based argumentation of difference and equal opportunities for men and women in universities' equality agenda turns more explicitly into a goal of individual talent acquisition in higher education policy documents. The focus of sex neutral personal development is compatible with the discourse of the utilization of individual skills and talents arisen in educational policies in the 90s (Kalalahti & Varjo, 2012), but also with the view of sex equality as individual rights and opportunities.

The aims of equalizing the resources or representation (usually by promoting women's participation) are commonly justified with economic efficiency (Unterhalter, 2005; Laiho, 2013). Higher education policy documents and partly in universities' equality agenda, however, attach the instrumental arguments rather on personal development and career advance. Open positions should be for instance *sought* by both men and women to guarantee the best potential, which is not argued through the balance of sex-distinctions. The arguments of attracting the skilled workers and encouraging women's careers as a prerequisite for productivity and competitiveness are somewhat distinctive with the arguments of common good, responsibility or the measurement through percentual aims.

While the idea of equality is not easily compatible with excellence (Naskali, 2009b.), Finnish universities' equality planning indicates the flexibility in equality conception. The emergence of non-discrimination and diversity have widened the equality agenda. The similar shifts are familiar from other Nordic contexts as well (Kantola et al., 2012; Svensson, 2006; Svensson & Gunnarsson, 2012). Diversity itself has been widely contested as a ubiquitous term with multiple meanings (Blackmore, 2006) and the shift in rhetoric from equality to diversity is seen also to indicate a perspective favouring the utilitarian viewpoint (Nielsen, 2014). Universities' equality agenda contains few separate mentions of sexual diversity and identity¹⁰ but in overall, diversity does not stand the same as in (feminist) intersectional interpretations. In both policy agendas, it rather settles as various demands on non-discrimination in terms of accessible environment and attraction of foreign experts. Some distinctions are to be found, while universities' planning seems rather to neutralise the differences, at least regarding to sex. The higher education policies emphasize differences rather positively (cf. Prügl, 2011), but concerning cultural diversity and as a strong asset.

Final remarks

In this article, I have asked how sex equality promotion is justified in Finnish academia, as part of university and research politics in the context of 2010s university reform. Equality issues are an institutionally accepted element in the personnel administration and thus, not vanished from universities' agenda, but integrated on managerial practices, quality assurance and internationalisation. Nevertheless, the promotion of sex equality seems to be justified with distinctive arguments. The legislation requires balancing uneven segregations and resource distribution, while the organisational and national success is linked to skills and the best potential, which sees equality as sex neutral individual rights.

The focus is on justifications of sex equality promotion in universities in relation to equality-related statements in higher education policies. Equality conception is touched on through them and only for indicative differences in definitions. Understanding the conceptual shifts in national and organisational

¹⁰ The way universities will acknowledge the extensions of the Equality Act about gender identity and expression will become visible in future equality planning.

equality politics would also require the analysis of transnational influences on them (see e.g. Kantola, 2014). Furthermore, the macro-level perspective regarding universities' equality planning as a whole is not capable to recognise differences among them. In addition, the frictions between the policy documents and the actual implementation practices in equality work, probably with different solutions between universities must be acknowledged.

Nevertheless, official equality agenda relates to what is considered important in organisations. The fluctuating nature of equality reveals how its justification is adjusted to various visions and demands. The argumentation and its vocabulary emphasis tell about the phenomenon itself, for which purposes and in which context the certain concepts are used. Claims for non-discrimination and diversity have transcended the sex equality at some extent, seemingly more compatible for market orientation, internationalisation and "ethos of excellence". In higher education policy documents, equality is left invisible and the few mentions pursue the search for the best talents. This view on equality differs from the traditional "Nordic model" and collective understanding is noticed both in sex equality (Kantola et al., 2012; Svensson, 2006) and in educational equality (Simola et al. 2002, Kalalahti & Varjo, 2012). For academia, this is also an ethical question. Is the role of universities reduced into offering career options for few, with the support of equality politics merely contributing to the search for individual and organisational excellence?

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Appendix 1. The list of data

A) The documents guiding the promotion of equality in universities

- The latest equality plans of 12 universities (collected 2015)

As a background:

- The universities' equality reports and instructions
- Act on Equality between Women and Men 1986 with its amendments up to 2011. Finlex, Finland.
- The government action plan for gender equality 2012-2015
- The latest university strategies (collected 2015)
- The latest personnel policy documents (collected 2015)

B) National higher education, university and research policy documents

- Ministry of Education and Culture
 - Korkeakoulut 2011 - yliopistot ja ammattikorkeakoulut

- Koulutuksen arviointisuunnitelma vuosille 2012–2015 (Education evaluation plan for 2012–2015)
- Koulutus ja tutkimus vuosina 2011–2016. Kehittämissuunnitelma (2012)
- Suomi osaamispohjaiseen nousuun. Tutkimus- ja innovaatiopolitiikan toimintaohjelma (2012) In cooperation with the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment
- Research and Innovation Council of Finland
 - Research and Innovation Policy Guidelines for 2011–2015
 - Reformativ Finland: Research and innovation policy review 2015–2020
- Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council (FINHEEC)
 - Evaluation of higher education institutions' social and regional impact (2013)

As a background:

- The Universities Act 2009